



BLM NEWS RELEASE

U.S. Department of the Interior • Bureau of Land Management • Washington, D.C., Office • 1849 C Street N.W. • Washington, D.C.

For immediate release: July 7, 2015

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BLM Announces New Research to Curb Population Growth and Improve Health of Wild Horse and Burro Herds

As part of its ongoing commitment to improving the health and management of wild horses and burros on federal lands in the West, the Bureau of Land Management today said it will initiate 21 research projects aimed at developing new tools for managing healthy horses and burros on healthy rangelands, including safe and effective ways to slow the population growth rate of the animals and reduce the need to remove animals from the public lands.

With virtually no natural predators, wild horse herds can double in size about every four years. Overpopulation on the range, in addition to prolonged drought conditions, can lead to the deterioration of the land and of the animals' health.

Over the past 40 years, the BLM has adopted out more than 230,000 horses and burros that were removed from the range to protect animal and land health. Today adoption rates are at record low levels. In the early 2000s the BLM was able to adopt out nearly 8,000 horses each year. Over the last few years annual adoption totals have been closer to 2,500 animals per year. As the BLM works with its partners to place more wild horses into private care, the BLM must care for unadopted animals in its off-range pastures and corrals. The total lifetime cost for caring for an unadopted animal is nearly \$50,000.

"Given the cost of caring for horses off the range and the difficulty of finding qualified adopters, it is clear that this challenge must be solved by addressing population growth on the range," said Mike Tupper, BLM Deputy Assistant Director for Resources and Planning. "The BLM is committed to developing new tools that allow us to manage this program sustainably and for the benefit of the animals and the land."

The BLM will work with leading university and U.S. Geological Survey scientists to develop tools that will better enable it to manage wild horses and burros on the range and reduce the need for off-range pastures and corrals. Scientists working on these projects will pursue the development of safe and humane on-range management techniques, including BLM's priority to develop longer lasting fertility-control vaccines, as well as methods for spaying and neutering wild horses. The BLM anticipates the total cost of the university and USGS projects to be \$11 million over 5 years.

At the time the BLM became responsible for managing these animals under the Wild Free-roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, about 25,000 wild horses and burros were on the range. Since then, the number of animals on the public lands has more than doubled to 58,150 as of March 1, 2015, which has led to overpopulation in many wild horse herds. In the last year alone, the population has risen about 18 percent – 9,000 animals. In addition to the nearly 60,000 horses and burros on range, an additional 47,000 horses and burros that were previously removed from the public lands are being cared for in off-range pastures and corrals.

“Wild horses and burros are an important part of our nation’s heritage,” Tupper said. “That’s why we are seeking innovative solutions to help us achieve a humane and cost-effective way to sustainably manage these animals on healthy rangelands for the enjoyment of generations to come.”

Last week, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that wild horses on federal public lands are not a distinct population segment of horses, and therefore not eligible for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The determination came in response to a petition submitted by two wild horse advocacy groups, which had claimed the wild horse is threatened with extinction.

Additional details about the research projects can be found [HERE](#).

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The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land, the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's mission is to manage and conserve the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations under our mandate of multiple-use and sustained yield. In Fiscal Year 2013, the BLM generated \$4.7 billion in receipts from public lands.